

A BRIEF RESPITE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON RUSSIA'S ORTHODOX CHRISTMAS TRUCE IN UKRAINE

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Russian President [Vladimir Putin's decision to observe a 36-hour ceasefire](#) on the [front line in Ukraine](#) comes at a time when his troops are struggling to cope with a series of battlefield setbacks and mounting casualties. The Kremlin's version is that it ordered the ceasefire, from Friday noon till Saturday midnight, as Orthodox Christians in both countries celebrate Christmas on January 7. Ukraine has questioned Russia's sincerity, saying the Kremlin would use the pause in fighting to replenish and rearm its forces and move more soldiers to the line of contact. Yet, if observed by both sides, this would be the first ceasefire on the entire front line since the [war began on February 24 last year](#). Mr. Putin's move appears more like a sign of weakness than any serious push for peace. On New Year's day, Russia lost at least 89 soldiers when [Ukraine targeted the eastern city of Makiivka](#) where hundreds of troops were temporarily stationed. In Bakhmut, the eastern city that has been under attack for six months, Ukraine says its troops pushed back the Russians.

Russia, which made some territorial gains in the early phase of the war, has been struggling to build battlefield momentum ever since Ukraine, armed and bankrolled by the collective West, started its counter-offensive in late August. [Ukraine recaptured swathes of territories from Russia](#), including much of the [Kharkiv Oblast](#) in the north-east and Kherson city in the south. Faced with battlefield setbacks, Gen. Sergey Surovikin, the new commander for the war, changed strategy — he redirected the offensive focus towards Donetsk, started building stronger defence lines across the vast front line, and launched a heavy bombardment campaign targeting Ukraine's critical energy infrastructure. The air strikes have partially damaged Ukraine's energy grid and disrupted power and water supplies to millions, but they have not changed the ground reality. If Ukraine survives winter, fighting could pick up pace. The U.S. and Germany have already announced that they would send Patriot missile systems to Ukraine. The U.S., France and Germany would also be sending armoured vehicles, to better prepare Kyiv for the coming land war. Cornered in the war theatre, Mr. Putin might come under enhanced pressure to escalate the conflict. But continuing this war will be costly for all sides. If the ceasefire holds for 36 hours, Mr. Putin should extend it further and seek dialogue, without preconditions, with both Ukraine and its backers in the West. The temporary truce should be the beginning of a lasting one.

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